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INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS TO FOLLOW UP THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Statement submitted by the World Federation of United Nations Associations, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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The World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) is an international non-governmental organization promoting public understanding of the United Nations and mobilizing public support for its activities. We are working towards bringing the people closer to the United Nations and the United Nations closer to the people. From among our 78 member associations two thirds come from developing countries.

It is our considered view that the United Nations should be open to non-governmental organizations on as open a basis as possible. We highly value the contribution that non-governmental organizations in consultative status make to the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, and we value as well the contributions made by non-governmental organizations not in consultative status, under special arrangements, to various United Nations organs and bodies and to past world conferences.

There are clearly significant differences between these two groups of non-governmental organizations, arising out of their scope of interest, outreach, nature of membership, legal status and history. The United Nations,

by opening its doors to this wide range of non-governmental organizations, can only benefit from their experience and expertise. This is of particular importance today, when civil society is becoming increasingly active and more willing to be politically active and to exercise influence on Governments. Non-governmental organizations are also very willing and committed to being actively involved in defining and implementing solutions to the problems and challenges facing the world community.

WFUNA wishes to express the following points regarding the question of the relationship between non-governmental organizations and the United Nations in general and the Commission on Sustainable Development in particular:

1. WFUNA welcomes initiatives with respect to the role of non-governmental organizations in the Commission on Sustainable Development.

2. We believe that it is not necessary to deal with this matter in such a way as to remove certain rights and privileges for category I and category II non-governmental organizations, rights and privileges which have existed since 1968 and which have operated well to date.

3. It would seem that the Commission on Sustainable Development should have procedures in place to permit the fullest possible participation of non-governmental organizations in its work without, at the same time, limiting the traditional role played by category I and category II non-governmental organizations. This appears to be the effect of the changes being proposed to rules 75 and 76 of the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council.

4. WFUNA is in agreement with the concept of having all United Nations conferences and decision-making bodies accessible to representatives of the non-governmental sector. As a matter of fact, WFUNA itself has encouraged its national affiliates to take an active role and to have separate representation in a number of United Nations conferences and meetings, most recently the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

5. Whatever is eventually decided by the Economic and Social Council or by the Commission on Sustainable Development, it will be the position of WFUNA that representatives of "We the peoples" must always be given the widest possible role. However, this cannot be done without ensuring that there is in place a predictable and transparant accreditation process. This process should be based on agreed criteria and have the provision that all accreditations should be reviewed on a regular basis. Representation in United Nations activities should not be accorded upon the whim of a few, nor should representation be denied on the basis of a decision of unaccountable officials.

6. Changes to rule 76 also have the effect of removing participatory rights and privileges acquired by category I and category II non-governmental organizations. This too does not appear to WFUNA to be necessary in the

circumstances. It is perhaps true that adding all the non-governmental organizations that participated in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to the Roster would create pressures on available space and services that are not easily accommodated. However, the answer of treating the representatives of all non-governmental organizations equally and thus lowering the rights and privileges already acquired does not seem to accord with established concepts of fairness.

7. WFUNA therefore urges that with respect to the Commission on Sustainable Development, and in general, category I and category II non-governmental organizations should maintain their existing rights, privileges and obligations. Other non-governmental organizations who are seeking accreditation to United Nations conferences and bodies, such as the Commission on Sustainable Development, should have full access. They should have privileges equivalent to category I and category II non-governmental organizations under the existing rules, should the facilities be available. However, when such facilities either are not available or would be overburdened, the secretariat of any such body should be in a position to meet with representatives of the non-governmental organizations affected in order for acceptable arrangements to be entered into that would facilitate their participation and the official distribution of their documents and statements.

8. Finally, WFUNA is in agreement with the suggestion that a review take place of the overall arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system. Resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968 should be re-examined and updated in the light of recent experience. However, the fundamental purpose of such a re-examination must be to expand the participation of the non-governmental sector in the work of the United Nations and of the Economic and Social Council. In other words, the process must have as its fundamental objective the expansion of rights rather than their limitation.

9. WFUNA is more than willing to play its full part in the elaboration of such new rules of procedure and in the re-examination of resolution 1296 (XLIV). We would do this in the spirit of ensuring that the United Nations becomes increasingly responsive to the views and concerns of peoples' organizations, whether they be international or national in scope, whether they be representative of northern concerns, southern concerns or both, whether they be broadly based in concern or narrowly focused in interest.